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ABSTRACT

This document describes a series of five booklets that have been developed to help parents and teachers teach children about the traffic system in an effort to avoid accidents. Booklet number one, which is included as part of this document, is a guide for parents describing the young child's pedestrian problem. Suggestions are offered on how to help children learn to cope with residential traffic and for managing children's movements in residential neighborhoods. Growth and developmental patterns that limit a child's capabilities to cope with traffic on his or her own are explained. In addition to the parent's guide, there are also available four picture books in the series for parents to use with their children. The major purpose of the first parent/child booklet is to help children develop the habit of stopping prior to entering a street. A section on driveways is also included. The second parent/child booklet offers simple instructions on how to cross a straight section of roadway. The major portion of this booklet is devoted to learning to scan for approaching traffic. Activities in the third parent/child booklet are designed to help children learn what intersections are and how pedestrians should use them. Activities in the fourth parent/child booklet are designed to help children learn to use traffic signal lights. A brief summary of the reactions of parents and teachers to the program is presented. (JMB)

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HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN TO COPE WITH TRAFFIC

Young children in the pedestrian traffic environment is a topic that is not often discussed by early childhood educators -- nor is traffic accident prevention included in the typical curriculum for young children. Yet, traffic accident data shows that far too many children learn pedestrian behaviors through trial and error. For example, did you know that in the last ten years over 10,000 children ages one through six have died as a result of involvement in pedestrian accidents? We seem to accept the terrible toll of human death and injury as a necessary part of mobility.

A young child is more likely to die as a result of traffic accident involvement, either as a passenger or as a pedestrian, than from any other single cause. This includes single diseases, poisoning, falls, drowning or suffocation. About one-half of these young traffic accident victims are passengers, and the other half are pedestrians. Traffic accidents involving young children haven't received the same kind of attention that child poisoning has, yet both are serious problems as well as being preventable accident types.

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In a closer examination of the young child pedestrian problem, we find that an average of three young children aged six and under die each day as a result of involvement in pedestrian accidents. However, deaths alone do not begin to show the magnitude of the problem. In the last ten years, as

many as 300,000 children six and under have been injured as a result of involvement in pedestrian accidents. On an average day, 79 young pedestrians across the country are injured.

These figures are astronomical and your first thoughts are probably: Do these accidents have a pattern? If so, what is it? What causes the accidents and how can they be prevented?

Let's begin by looking at the kinds of accidents in which young children are involved. A large portion of the accidents follow a similar pattern which is known as "dart out," or the sudden appearance of a child in the roadway, in the path of a car. Both driver and child are on a collision course, and neither is aware of the other. Most "dart out" accidents occur on innocent-looking residential streets with low traffic volume, on a day when the weather is nice and youngsters are outside playing. In a typical accident situation the child is attempting to cross a street within two blocks of his or her home. Generally, the street is a straight, residential two-laned roadway with two way traffic. The child is usually alone, playing or on the way to or from a friend's house, and is running and looking straight ahead. The vehicle is a car, traveling straight ahead at a speed of less than 30 mph.

Observation in almost any residential neighborhood with a high population of young children reveals that many youngsters run across streets rarely breaking their stride or looking for traffic. Some kids use the street as a playground on a regular basis. And public streets are not the only traffic hazard for young children; even driveways can be dangerous. Every year several hundred children are killed or injured in their own driveways, usually by their parents or other family members.

It is obvious that young children do have difficulty in dealing with low volume residential traffic, and of course it goes without saying that they have great difficulty in dealing with more complex traffic situations. It's easy to understand why they have trouble coping with traffic when you look at some of the specific reasons.

First, young children don't see traffic patterns in the way that adults do. In many cases their visibility is blocked. A young child's eye level typically ranges from 36 to 40 inches above the ground. Preschool children simply cannot see over the hoods or trunks of cars. Parked cars, shubbery, fences, mounds of snow or other objects near the roadway may block their view. In addition, young childrens' perception abilities are still developing. Focusing and perception appear to be less rapid and precise than in adults. Sometimes it seems that children see only a blur, and at other times they seem to focus on only one small aspect of a total picture.

Mental capabilities also play a large part in explaining childrens' actions around traffic. Their thinking is characterized by what they see or want rather than logical reasoning. As a result of their inability to deal with multiple incoming stimuli, they typically think of one thing at a time. Their short attention spans and egocentric thought patterns also limit their ability to cope with traffic. In addition, it is doubtful that children ages six and under understand the true meaning of danger or death.

Intense and spontaneous reactions also add to a child's difficulties in a traffic situation. They have not yet learned to control excitement, anger, fear or jealousy. As a result, they often express feelings and thoughts through

actions rather than words. A reponse that includes darting across the street may seem to be quite natural to a young child. In many residential neighborhoods, everyday play situations mean crossing streets. Usually when children cross streets in this manner, they are not conscious of either safety or danger. They merely do what they think about at any given moment.

The developmental processes discussed above are a normal part of growing up, and it is unlikely that the processes can be speeded up. However, it is unthinkable to continue to allow such large numbers of young pedestrians to be killed or injured. The question that we as persons concerned about the well being of young children must answer is: WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT YOUNG CHILDREN FROM BECOMING INVOLVED IN PEDESTRIAN ACCIDENTS? A combination of both protection and guidance is required. Children should be taught to deal with traffic environments to the extent and at the rate that their capabilities allow. In other words, children should be protected while being taught how to deal with traffic under the guidance of a competent person. Walking habits that are developed when a child is two, three, four or five will help to prevent accidents when he or she is six, seven, eight and older.

Parents, other competent family members, and teachers of young children are the only persons in a position to protect youngsters and at the same time help them learn to deal with residential traffic. However, parents must assume the major responsibility, since habits are formed before many children start school. In addition, kids learn best through real world experiences, and parents or family members are the only persons in a position to guide children's walking habits in their own neighborhoods on a daily basis.

To help with this task a program entitled, "Preschool Chidren in Traffic" has been developed to assist parents and teachers in guiding children to learn about the traffic system. The ideal use of the program is as part of the existing parent involvement programs conducted through school systems. Parents become involved in an educational area about which they are already concerned. Safety concepts for accident prevention are presented, as well as learning to do efficiently and effectively the things which one will, as a matter of course, be involved in over a lifetime. Crossing streets is certainly one of those activities. The entire program is built around how children learn. Emphasis is on learning by doing in real, "on-the-street" situations.

The backbone of the program is a series of five booklets, beginning with a guide for parents describing the young child's pedestrian problem. Suggestions are offered on how to help children learn to cope with residential traffic, and for managing children's movements in residential neighborhoods. The philosoply of combining protection and guidance is explained, and the guide emphasizes that children should be taught to deal with traffic to the extent and at the rate their capabilities allow. Growth and developmental patterns that limit a child's capabilities to cope with traffic on his or her own are explained.

In addition to the parent's guide, there are four booklets for parents to use with their children. Each of the four booklets begins with an introduction explaining the purpose of the activities that are illustrated. These booklets are designed so that parents can discuss the illustrations and practice the ideas in real traffic environments with their children. The importance of using the booklets, first as a basis for discussion and then for practice of the ideas, cannot be over emphasized. In everyday situations, parents or

teachers can use teachable moments to help the child understand how he or she must function as a pedestrian.

The major purpose of the first parent/child booklet, "When I Go Outside," is to help children develop the habit of stopping prior to entering a street. In order to accomplish this task, children must first develop basic concepts about traffic environments. They must learn to differentiate between places for cars and places for walkers. Thus, different types of streets and pedestrian facilities are shown in order to help children learn to separate the two. Basic concepts such as drivers, riders, and walkers are included. Such fundamentals form the basis for helping children learn to stop prior to entering streets. However, adult guidance is critical in helping young children learn to cope with traffic. Some parents have told us that it is helpful to use a slight hand squeeze to signal their son or daughter when and where to stop.

A section on driveways has been included since playing in a driveway is a potential threat that young children generally do not recognize. Children can learn to identify this hazard by being shown what vehicles operating in reverse gear look like, by listening to a car engine starting, by looking at the exhaust coming out of the tail-pipe, and by pointing out the back-up light. Young children can generally understand that these clues mean a driver is going to back up. They need to know that when this situation arises, they must move quickly out of the way.

The next booklet, "I Listen And Look For Cars Coming," offers simple instructions on how to cross a straight section of roadway. In fact, straight sections of streets in residential areas are used exclusively in the first

two booklets. Out of necessity, many suburban children, since they live in areas where intersections may be one to two blocks away, begin by crossing streets in front of their homes. In terms of a child's mental and visual capabilities, it is in fact easier for them to understand and cope with vehicles approaching from only two directions on a stright roadway than it is to cope with the complexities of signs, signals, markings and turning vehicles found at intersections.

The major portion of the booklet is devoted to learning to scan for approaching traffic. When the actions of children around traffic were examined, it became obvious that they did not naturally scan for approaching vehicles. Rather, this is a behavior that must be learned. When near a street, children can be shown how to look for approaching traffic. When demonstrating scanning, it is helpful to gain eye contact with the children by stooping or squatting. In addition, this gives you a better "child's eye view" of the traffic situation. While turning your head to the left and then to the right, point in the direction you are scanning with an arm and finger movement, explaining, "This is how we look for cars coming." children can learn the same actions using the following kind of guidance:

> "Find the street with your finger. Follow the street with your finger as far as you can see one way." (This should be to the left, since that is the area of immediate concern.) "Do you see any cars, trucks, or buses coming? Now follow the street with your finger as far as you can see the other way." (This is to the right.) "Do you see anything coming? A car, truck, bus, bicycle or motorcycle?"

If necessary, the child's arm/finger movements can be gently guided a few times. The words left and right should not be used, since most three to six year olds do not know their left from their right. The term "one way" for left and the term "the other way" for right seems to work well.

Since it is critical that children be able to see the street before they scan, a section on visibility has also been included. Remember -- children's eye levels are less than 40 inches above the ground. Therefore, if visibility is blocked, it is necessary for the child to find a location where he or she can look for approaching traffic.

Activities in the third booklet, "How I Cross The Street," are designed to help kids learn what intersections are and how pedestrians should use them. Generally, a child's movement away from home begins to expand about the time he or she starts kindergarten or first grade. It is at this time that children will encounter intersections and will have to learn to deal with more complex traffic situations than those encountered when crossing the street in front of their home.

Just as in the first two booklets, basic concepts are introduced. For example, the word "traffic" is used for the first time. When a new word is introduced it's a good idea to discuss the word to be sure children fully understand its meaning. Children need to realize what traffic is and that it moves faster than walkers. They also need to understand what an intersection is and that not all intersections are alike. As a result, several kinds of intersections are shown. The basic information for the child to understand is that the purpose of an intersection is the orderly movement of vehicles and walkers. The suggested activities consist of taking youngsters to an intersection located near their home while discussing driver and walker actions.

While observing activities at the intersection, the following types of questions can be used to stimulate thinking and problem solving:

- "Why do some cars stop and others do not?"
- "What could happen if none of the cars stopped?"
- "What do you think it means when the car has its signal light on?"
- "Do some drivers turn without using their signal light?"

After explaining what intersections are and how drivers use them, the next step is to show children how walkers should use intersections. In most states, drivers are required by law to yield to a pedestrian within a marked crosswalk. However, reality demonstrates that we should not teach children to depend on "perfect" drivers. We must teach children to walk defensively. For example, children should understand that crosswalks indicate where walkers should cross the streets. It would be very dangerous, however, for them to believe that they will be safe just because they use crosswalks. They must understand that all drivers will not yield or stop to allow them to cross the street. Corners, curbs, crosswalks, stop signs, yield right-of-way signs and vehicle turn signals all help pedestrians know when and where they may cross the street. Adults must help children identify and use these clues.

Activities in the fourth booklet are designed to help children learn to use traffic signal lights. After adult and child read and discuss this booklet together, it is recommended that the child be taken to an intersection near his or her home that is controlled by a traffic signal light. If possible, it is best to choose an intersection the youngster will use when alone; for instance, when walking to or from school or to and from a neighborhood store. Standing near the intersection, driver and walker actions should be examined. How do each respond to the traffic light? Why do drivers and walkers take certain actions?

The booklet starts by explaining the function of traffic lights -- to tell drivers and walkers when to stop and when to go. Next, it points out that hanging lights look different from those on a post. In addition, the meaning of each color of the light is explained. When traffic signal lights are mounted on a corner post, children should learn that walkers watch the light straight across the street they want to cross. Adults should emphasize that when the light turns green walkers must look for cars that might not stop or those that will be turning.

When the intersection is equipped with WALK and DON'T WALK signals, children should learn how to use them. However, we do not want children to depend entirely on signals. They must again look for cars that might not stop or that are turning, even though their light is green and the signal says WALK.

Young children may be puzzled by hanging lights. The light itself is difficult to see and interpret. Due to its position over the traffic lane, pedestrians cannot see the green light once they start to cross the street. The light they see is red. In such cases, children must learn to base their actions on the actual movement of traffic, in addition to the color of the light or lights. Young pedestrian's must learn to cross only when they are sure traffic on the street they wish to cross is stopped, and when drivers see them. This is a very demanding task for young children; they need a gread deal of adult guidance and practice to become proficient. Fortunately, most children do not have to use this type of intersection when they are alone.

Having become familiar with the contents of "Preschool Children in Traffic," you might be interested to learn the reactions of parents and teachers who have used the program. At four different locations in the nation, nursery schools, kindergartens, child care centers and parents of preschoolers on a military base

cooperated in evaluating the program based on ease of use and "understandability." Of those participating in the testing, 110 parents with 138 children aged two through six years of age who used the program from 2 to 5 weeks provided detailed written evaluations.

This is what they said about the program:

1) 99 plus % of the children were interested in the booklets and activities.
2) 89% of the parents became more aware of how to help their children learn to cope with residential traffic.
3) 96% of the parents plan to continue using the materials.
4) 97% of the parents recommend that other parents use the materials.
5) 99 plus % of the parents plan to continue using the suggested activities.

During the test period, parents averaged approximately two hours per week for over three weeks reading and practicing the suggested activities with their children. Each of the four booklets was read an average of over five times. Parents and children spent six hours together improving the child's ability to cope with residential traffic.

The parents felt that the program was extremely beneficial to their children. After using the booklets:

1) 92% said their children were more aware of the differences in areas used by pedestrians and those used by motor vehicles.
2) 77% felt their child was less likely to run into the street.
3) 88% said their child is more likely to stop at the edge of a street when alone.
4) 96% said their child is more likely to look for approaching vehicles;

5) 92% said that their children were aware that a vehicle could hit them if they were in the street.

The learning activities become quite a bit more complex in booklets number 3 and 4. Substantially fewer parents felt their children could or would consistently perform these activities while alone at the end of the short test period.

For example:

1) 78% said their children understood how to use crosswalks.
2) 64% said their child was capable of crossing the street at a residential intersection while alone.
3) However, only 38% felt their child could demonstrate safe walking procedures at a residential intersection controlled by a traffic signal light.

Parents of younger children tended to emphasize the value of and spend more time working with the first two booklets while parents of older preschoolers emphasized the last two booklets. Many parents of five and six year olds commented that they wished they could have had the booklets when their children were three or four. Most parents understood that younger preschool children were not ready to tackle the tasks included in booklets 3 and 4. However, a few parents tended to over-estimate their child's ability to cope with complex traffic situations and indicated that they felt their three or four year olds could deal with traffic lights; this is a virtual impossibility.

The teachers' responses were overwhelmingly positive. They felt the program was needed, well prepared and a useful tool for improving home/school communications. They recommended incorporating the program into the existing parent

involvement structure. Several teachers noted that the program was more beneficial to parents who attended a brief orientation meeting than to those who were simply given the materials. They also expressed a desire for additional classroom materials to use with larger groups of young children. At some point in the future we plan to undertake this project.

To summarize, parents, and teachers evaluating the program plan to continue using it, and recommend that others who are interested in the welfare of young children do the same.

This program does not offer a resolution to the total problem of preschool pedestrian accidents; however, if it has the support of early childhood educators and community leaders and is utilized properly, it can help to reduce pedestrian accidents among young children. We can meet the goal of reducing early childhood pedestrian deaths and injuries only through cooperative efforts.

Early Childhood Traffic Education

PARENTS' GUIDE FOR ACTION

preschool children in traffic

PS 009341

preschool children in traffic . . .

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Reducing young children's pedestrian accidents

When small children are near any street or motor vehicle traffic with you, with other children, or by themselves, their safety becomes a special consideration. Certain questions need to be answered. How much supervision do children need? Where should they play? How far from home should they be allowed to go? Can they deal with street traffic? How?

If allowed complete freedom – when walking with adults, in selecting play locations or moving to and from play areas – children will take actions beyond their capabilities to handle. They tend to run across the street, play in driveways and streets and, in general, disregard traffic.

It is essential, therefore, that preschool children be protected and – to the extent their capabilities allow – helped to cope with the problems of vehicle traffic. The AAA has designed a series of booklets to assist you in providing for the traffic safety education of children, three to six years of age. Simple pictures about traffic form the basis for real-world child and parental experiences. By using the booklets you can help your child to assume pedestrian responsibilities progressively as his or her capabilities increase.

The booklets are sequential in nature. The first booklet should be used until children consistently demonstrate the desired behaviors on their

own in the real world. If a parent starts to use the program with a two- or three-year-old, the activities illustrated in booklets 1 and 2 may require several months of practice before the child consistently demonstrates the desired behaviors. In contrast, a five-year-old may need only a few weeks. Each child differs in the length of time required to learn to accept more responsibility. However, most children under four will have difficulty consistently performing the activities presented in booklet 3. Similarly, most children under age five will have difficulty with booklet 4.

The primary objectives of the program are twofold. First is to reduce the incidence of "dart-out" behavior (running suddenly into streets) and playing in streets. Second is to help youngsters develop habits necessary for safe performance in the traffic environment. The approach employed in these activities does not rely on punishment, scolding, scare tactics, or memorizing a list of safety rules. Emphasis is placed on *LEARNING BY DOING*, and the repetition of *ADULT-DIRECTED* experiences.

"When I Go Outside"—Booklet 1 (Ages 2½ to 6)
—helps children learn to stay out of the street. They learn where to play and walk outside and how to tell when a car is coming, going or backing.

"I Listen and Look For Cars Coming" – Booklet 2 (Ages 3 to 6)
– helps children learn what actions to take and explains why those actions are necessary when they are near streets. It encourages children to assume *some* responsibility for their own actions on residential streets close to home while with adults.

"How I Cross a Street" – Booklet 3 (Ages 4 to 6)
– shows children what actions to take when crossing streets and explains why these actions should be taken. It illustrates typical traffic situations that young children encounter in their expanding areas of movement.

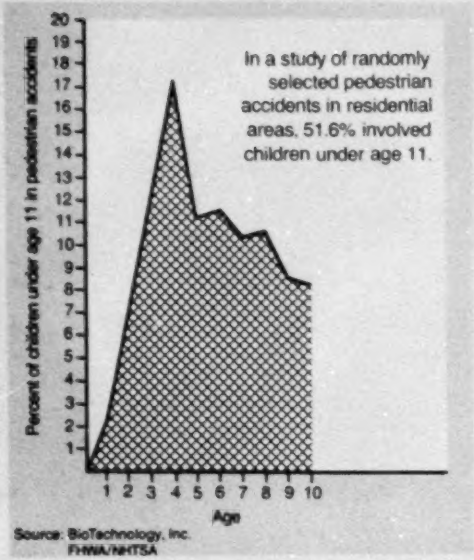
"The Traffic Signal Light" – Booklet 4 (Ages 5 to 6)
– helps children learn how to use traffic signal lights.

Young pedestrians and traffic accidents

The rationale for this preschool pedestrian safety program is based on the following considerations:

Each year there are about 130,000 pedestrian deaths and injuries. Approximately one half (60,700) of all pedestrian injuries involve children under 15 years of age.

Even more alarming is the fact that children from two to six years of age are estimated to be involved in from 18 to 25 percent of all pedestrian accidents. Yet this age group represents only about 6 percent of the total population.



In short, young children are pedestrian accident victims much more frequently than any other segment of the population.

The "typical" preschool child pedestrian accident occurs when a youngster attempts to cross a street within two blocks of his or her home. The accident happens on a straight stretch of residential two-lane roadway with two-way traffic, during the day when the weather is either fair or cloudy. The vehicle involved is typically a car traveling straight ahead at a speed of less than 30 mph. As far as the driver is concerned, the child appears suddenly, dashing across the street without looking for approaching vehicles. The child is usually alone and on the way to or from a friend's house. This type of accident is called "dart-out." The child is most likely to be a four-year-old male. In fact, more than two out of three preschool pedestrian accident victims are males.

In addition to darting into streets, the familiar childhood action of playing in streets, on driveways or sidewalks also can lead to accidents. (Each year, over 300 children are killed playing in their own driveways.)

Developmental characteristics that influence a child's behavior

Any attempt to teach traffic safety must consider the characteristics of young children. Let's examine why children behave as they do around streets and traffic.

During the preschool years, from the end of toddlerhood to age six, children make tremendous strides in physical, mental, social, and

emotional growth and development. They discover themselves, other people and meet the world with exuberance. Play is their business and they are constantly active. They are naturally curious and eager to learn.

Physical Characteristics

The height of three-to five-year olds places them at a distinct disadvantage. Their eye levels range from 35 to 40 inches above the ground. In contrast, adult eye levels generally range from about 60-69 inches. To gain a better perspective of this crucial factor, stoop, sit or kneel to get an idea of what the traffic environment looks like from a child's level. You will find it impossible to see as much, and the perspective will be quite different.

In addition, visual development is not yet complete. Children under six years of age are typically farsighted and side vision is not well developed. Their eyes are not well coordinated and focusing requires more time than is generally true of adults. Some youngsters may see only part of a situation; at other times what they see is a blur and they may be unable to focus or identify important items. In addition, they do not localize sound as well as adults.

Mental Characteristics

Young children are unaware of traffic laws and how they, as individuals, fit into the traffic system. Their thinking is a combination of reality and fantasy, knowledge and miscomprehensions. They usually think of only one thing at a time, have short attention spans, are impulsive and inherently curious. Furthermore, children under six rarely understand the true nature of dangerous situations. They can understand a situa-

tion from their point of view only and are unable to assume another person's position. Children's thinking is typically based on what they see, rather than reasoning. However, they can begin to develop skills for using their eyes and ears to gather details concerning traffic if they are guided to do so.

Emotional Characteristics

Children often act on the basis of emotion rather than logic. Fear, excitement, anger or jealously may intensify as children engage in activities that bring them in contact with traffic. Children are often unpredictable due to strong emotions associated with situations such as a birthday party, family fight, even something as simple as buying ice cream. Under such circumstances a child's spontaneous reaction may to be bolt straight for or away from a particular person or object with total disregard for traffic.

Social Characteristics

A fourth factor is that between ages three and six, children are attempting to become sociable, somewhat self-reliant and independent people. Playing with other children becomes important and it seems very reasonable to a young child to join other children. Around age three, youngsters show interest in being near children their own age; however, they prefer to play beside rather than with other children. Typical four-year-olds wish to expand their world more quickly than parents generally anticipate. They seem to have few self constraints and are constantly on the move. At about age five, children become interested in their community, more independent and self-sufficient.

Friendships can become strong and they prefer to play in small groups.

When playing, young children are drawn to locations where they can be active and play with other youngsters. Areas that are particularly attractive are hard surfaces for wheeled toys, areas where other children gather, well-equipped playgrounds, pools, ponds or streams of water, vacant lots, areas with loose sand or dirt and vacant dwellings. These locations may be either safe or unsafe, and getting there may involve *crossing streets*. From the point of view of young children, safety is not a distinguishing characteristic. Their criteria is *activity* and *companionship*. When they find little to do in their own yards or in areas that have been designated for them, they are likely to seek more desirable locations.

In summary, young pedestrians are in a very difficult position due to the normal process of growing up. They are curious, adventurous and act impulsively. They alternate between affection and aggression, independence and dependency, competency and limitations. They lack knowledge and experience in making judgments about space (distance) and the *time* necessary for safe street crossing. Their reasons for crossing a street have nothing to do with safe or dangerous actions. They still do not have concepts of what is safe, dangerous, or illegal. They give most of their attention to play, family or friends and it is unlikely that they will think about or respond to traffic at the same time, unless properly guided.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN PARENTS TAKE?

The two basic approaches for insuring your child's safety as a pedestrian are: (1) Isolation from traffic unless the child is supervised. (2) Teaching your child to cope with traffic to the extent of his or her ability. It is impossible, impractical, and undesirable to completely isolate children from traffic; therefore, positive action to teach the child to deal with traffic must be taken to reduce the likelihood of accidents.

What does this involve?

a. Set boundaries and rules not to cross streets alone or with other young children.

The first step is to establish boundaries beyond which your child cannot go. When you set boundaries you must be *willing to enforce them*. Such boundaries obviously depend on individual circumstances and should typically expand as follows: When children first begin to play outside it is reasonable – with an adult nearby – for them to play in their own yard or next door. By the time a child is three or four, he or she will generally be able to go to nearby homes alone. This, of course, depends on the volume of traffic on a given street. The boundaries will have to extend further by the time your child starts school. At this point, most children must assume responsibility for crossing some streets by themselves.

The transfer of responsibility from parent to child should occur gradually, with you guiding your child's actions. Your child should demon-

strate to you consistently over a period of several weeks that he or she knows and can follow safe procedures before being allowed to cross any street alone. At this point, it is reasonable for a child to cross designated streets in residential areas where the volume of traffic is low. Bear in mind, however, that even children who have entered first grade need adult guidance when selecting routes, crossing busy residential streets and/or crossing any main traffic artery.

b. Provide safe play areas that children find desirable.
The second suggestion is designed to minimize the possibility of children playing or darting into streets. Remember, the primary criterion children use to identify a good play area is that it always offers "something to do." A sand box will provide such activity. Add buckets, shovels, sifters and containers and young children can be happy for hours. Something to climb, a couple of hiding places, boxes and boards for making things and a swing will give days of productive and enjoyable play for young children.

Another major ground rule to establish is where young children will use wheeled toys such as tricycles, bicycles or wagons. Children prefer to use wheeled toys on hard surfaces because of the difficulty of riding on grass, a fact that children recognize very early. However, most paved areas are either streets or connect with streets. Whether it is safe for your child to use a wheeled toy on a sidewalk or in your driveway will depend on individual circumstances.

Your preschooler should not ride wheeled toys in or play in the street under any circumstances. If you do not have a sidewalk or driveway that is suitable for wheeled toys, what alternatives are available? Allow your child to have wheeled riding toys, but restrict their use to an area that you consider safe, such as a basement or backyard patio. Another alternative is to supervise children's riding at nearby playgrounds or parks.

c. Make arrangements for children to get back and forth across streets when necessary.

Having boundaries necessitates making plans for crossing streets when your child desires to go beyond previously established limits. In some cases, it may be possible to move about the neighborhood without crossing streets. Whatever the conditions, decide on the places your child can go alone and the route to be used to get there and back again. Whenever possible use backyards, sidewalks, and common areas or cul-de-sacs. Obviously, such a plan will meet with better results if all nearby parents follow the same guidelines.

When children must cross the street to reach friends or playgrounds, walk with them until they have demonstrated the ability to cross by themselves. This is the time to show your youngster how to cross a street and make sure that he or she practices safe behaviors. During these brief moments, children can demonstrate how well they understand traffic.

Before taking children across a street and leaving them to play with others, consider certain situations. What will they do if they get into an argument, get hurt, want a drink of water, another toy, or have to use the toilet? Is your child likely to dash for home, disregarding traffic? Until you know your child can handle crossing the street in such situations, make arrangements with an adult the youngster can contact if necessary.

d. Teach children to deal with traffic to the extent that their capabilities allow.

The above three suggestions have as their intent separating children from traffic unless supervised. A fourth suggestion is to provide *supervised* learning experiences that will help your child learn to deal with traffic. The traffic picture booklets mentioned earlier can help you and your children with the *whats*, *whys* and *hows* of residential traffic. The pictures provide a basis for you and your child to talk about street traffic and then practice the same ideas when walking.

Actions for parents to follow when guiding child pedestrian activities

• Show your child what actions to take

All children need practice in actual traffic situations. It is not enough to tell your son or daughter to "be careful" when they are near streets. They need to experience crossing streets with you, before they can safely cross streets alone. You are their model. For that reason, *your use* of safe, consistent and accurate pedestrian behavior is critical. Cross the street with your child only when there is a safe

gap in traffic. Your child will copy your actions. If you run or rush or take other high risk actions in traffic, your child will think he or she should do the same thing.

• ***Talk WITH children rather than AT them***
Explain to your son or daughter what actions they are to take and why. Listen to their comments and questions. In addition you can ask questions to help your children clarify their thinking. Some model questions that help children learn to think are as follows:

Could that be because . . . . ?
What happens when . . . . ?
How would . . . . work?
When should we . . . . ?
Would you like to . . . . or . . . . ?

• ***Mistakes are a natural part of learning***
Sometimes your son or daughter will misunderstand your directions or make a mistake when dealing with traffic. When a mistake is made, rather than scolding, encourage talking, thinking and problem-solving. No one likes to be made a fool of and told he or she is wrong. Your tone of voice or facial expressions can convey this message as well as your spoken words. If mistakes are used to make children feel inferior, they will soon give up trying rather than risk being wrong. In addition, it is not a good idea to simply teach children "*the* right answer." This teaches children to please you or be "cute" rather than learn to deal with changing traffic situa-

tions. Finally, it can be very comforting for youngsters to realize that their parents sometimes misunderstand or make mistakes too.

• ***Deal with straight sections of streets before intersections***
Children should understand how traffic operates on straight sections of streets before they attempt to cope with intersections. They can understand and cope with two directions easier than four or more, plus turning vehicles, signs and signals. For this reason, straight sections of streets are used exclusively in the first two booklets.

• ***Individualize the booklets***
Roadway layouts and pedestrian facilities vary tremendously in residential neighborhoods. As a result, you should tailor your discussions and walking habits to the actual traffic environment that you use. For example, traditionally intersections have been designated as the appropriate and safe place to cross streets. That standard should be followed when walking in downtown sections and areas with city blocks, sidewalks, and marked crosswalks. However, many suburban communities have streets with loops, dead-ends, cul-de-sacs, long stretches, few intersections, no sidewalks or marked crosswalks. It may not be safe or practical to walk to an intersection to cross the street in this type of neighborhood when the child's goal is directly across the street. Use the booklets to compare the similarities and differences of the streets you actually use.

The Preschool Children in Traffic program was developed by the American Automobile Association to meet the critical problem of pedestrian accidents involving children under 6 years of age.

Need for such a program is demonstrated in these statistics: children age 2 to 6 represent just over 6% of the total population, but are involved in up to 25% of all pedestrian mishaps.

It was determined that the most promising approach to improving preschool pedestrian safety is to provide parents with concepts and materials needed to assist their children in learning to deal with real-world traffic environments. The program also is suitable for use by nursery schools, day care centers and other educational systems for the very young.

This program was created by the AAA Department of Traffic Engineering and Safety.

3260 PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN TRAFFIC: Parents' Guide for Action
3261 "WHEN I GO OUTSIDE" – Booklet 1
3262 "I LISTEN AND LOOK FOR CARS COMING" – Booklet 2
3263 "HOW I CROSS A STREET" – Booklet 3
3264 "TRAFFIC SIGNAL LIGHTS" – Booklet 4

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